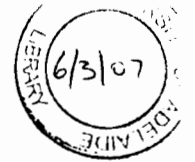


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The Illusion of History: Time and its Absence in the Radical
Political Imagination

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the imaginative rationale governing three figureheads of the radical political imagination, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx and Michel Foucault. It seeks to uncover an underlying interest behind their approach to philosophy, politics, and institutions in particular. Hopefully, the articulation of this generally shared approach can reveal the obvious differences in their projects to be simply elaborate divergent expressions of this primary thematic. As an examination of the imaginative tropes and horizons of these thinkers, this thesis is not solely devoted to just their political and philosophical interests, but engages seriously with the poetical, literary, autobiographical, historical and artistic threads in which they actively and inadvertently engage.

The general foundation upon which these thinkers have built their radical approaches to society is the dualistic philosophy epitomised by Immanuel Kant. The argument is that Kant's own unresolvable division between nature and freedom, noumena and phenomena, morality and politics, ideal and history, creates an inventive logic of timelessness that pathologically attempts to overcome the chasm between these terms. The argument extends to claim that the featured thinkers all take up this timeless problematic either wittingly or unwittingly, and are incapable of expunging its problematics and challenges from their own political imaginations. This timelessness, and by consequence the moral individual that such timelessness is intended to reinforce, manifests itself in these thinkers' work as various visions of history that favour one aspect of time over another. This favouritism is born from the need to implant timelessness into history and constitutes the 'illusion' that their histories carry.

Rousseau represents the extension of the burgeoning societal timeless spirit into a prehistoric vision of nature. Marx represents the extension of this atemporal spirit into the future of a post-historic epoch of Communism. Foucault represents the installation of this attitude within the permanence of a history-less present. Thus, this thesis discusses these thinkers from the particular plane of time (past, present or future) in which they find timelessness having the greatest influence.

This thesis focuses upon Kant's contribution to political and moral philosophy in the limited sense of its critical functions, and, as such, concentrates upon the impairment such

a radical manifestation of this critical position can exact upon history. As such it wishes to expose those radical extensions of its timeless logic into illusory ideas of history as inadequate conceptions of the real capacity and breadth of timely institutional history.

This inadequacy is demonstrated in this thesis, firstly by demonstrating the differing temporal preferences already stated, and how these lead to defective views of how history should and does operate. Secondly, this thesis will endeavour to show that these historical inclinations are simply immoderate and partial solutions to the timelessness that is inherent to their project. They are not so much solutions to, as symptoms of, this philosophical predicament. This predicament is usually expressed as a critically unfavourable attitude to institutional reality, and a greatly expanded sense of the individual's freedom and power to combat this reality. This extreme critical stance on preceding institutions and the exaggerated awareness of individual selfhood will be shown to be an attendant pairing to any timeless illusion of history.